

Board of Scientific Counselors
National Center for Health Statistics
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Minutes of the Sixth Meeting
April 21-22, 2005
National Center for Health Statistics Headquarters
3311 Toledo Road
Hyattsville, Maryland 20782

June O'Neill, Ph.D., Chair of the Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), convened the sixth meeting of the BSC at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 21, 2005. Dr. O'Neill welcomed to the table, Dr. Simon Cohn, Chair of the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics. The names of others attending the meeting are listed in Attachment #1.

State of the Center:

Dr. Edward Sondik, NCHS Director, made a presentation on the "State of the Center". He announced new NCHS management appointments, provided an update on NCHS programs, and highlighted new data releases. He reported that Congress approved CDC's new organizational structure, making it official. Dr. Sondik described the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), which will be used to assess NCHS performance. He said that PART is a rigorous, formal mechanism through which NCHS will document its program's purpose, methods, performance standards, management approaches, and outcomes.

Discussion:

Several Board members expressed concern about the ability of NCHS to meet its program needs under the current budget. Dr. Sondik said that the Department is in the midst of formulating its 2007 budget, and he invited Board members to provide suggestions as to initiatives that should be taken into account during the budget process. Dr. Sondik referred to DHHS Departmental efforts to look at opportunities for reducing duplication of effort in data collection. Dr. Madans offered to share with Board members a document that outlines key data collection activities in the Department. Dr. Sondik was asked about progress on the electronic medical record, and he said that he would be working with Dr. David Brailer, National Health Information Technology Coordinator, to advance efforts in this area. Dr. Onaka said that it was important to extend the benefits of electronic records, to State vital records offices.

Update from NCVHS:

Dr. Aldona Robbins introduced Dr. Simon Cohn, new Chair of the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics. Dr. Cohn thanked Dr. Robbins for her service as BSC liaison to NCVHS, and he encouraged the Board to quickly identify a replacement for

her. He invited the Board to send its new liaison to the NCVHS Executive Committee retreat in San Francisco in August, and he urged the Board to work toward more collaboration with NCVHS. Dr. Robbins announced that, as her BSC term was expiring, this would be her last meeting of the Board. She thanked Drs. Cohn and Lumpkin (former NCVHS Chair) for their support, and extended special thanks to Marjorie Greenberg of NCHS, for her work as Executive Secretary of the Committee. On behalf of the BSC, Dr. O'Neill thanked Dr. Robbins for her service as BSC liaison to NCVHS.

Tour of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) Medical Examination Center (MEC)

Board members received a tour of the NHANES MEC. NHANES staff described survey components and answered questions about survey operations.

Internal Review of NCHS Programs

Dr. Jennifer Madans opened the discussion by summarizing the deliberations of the subgroup of Board members who volunteered to help develop a process for NCHS program reviews. Dr. Madans distributed a draft protocol that was developed in consultation with the subgroup (attachment #2). The draft protocol called for NCHS program managers to provide materials to review teams of experts who would present their evaluations to the full BSC for their consideration. The draft protocol outlined materials to be provided and categories of questions to be asked. Questions addressed current adequacy of NCHS resources and products; responsiveness to need related to resources and products; and efforts to improve. Board discussion followed.

There was general agreement that while the program reviews should be expansive, the Board was committed to minimizing the burden to NCHS program managers. The process could largely consist of “structured discussions” between reviewers and NCHS program managers; the product did not have to be a lengthy document. There was general agreement that reviews should focus both on how well NCHS is doing in using its current resources to best advantage, as well as considering future directions and needs. The consensus of the Board was that each review team should consist of at least three people and at least one Board member should be assigned to each review team.

There were differing opinions as to the timetable for conducting reviews. Some Board members preferred an onsite review immediately prior to the September meeting, followed by a presentation by reviewers to the Board at the September meeting. Other Board members preferred an earlier review that would allow for Board members to receive a report for their consideration, well in advance of the Board meeting. The Board agreed that Drs. Kalsbeek and Madans would recommend a process, as part of a new draft protocol that would be circulated to the full Board.

The following points were made by various Board members during the discussion: The review should address data providers as well as data users; the review should address methods research; the review framework should draw from other evaluation activities

and procedures, such as PART and the DHHS Quality Guidelines; the review should address the question as to whether there is enough analysis by NCHS staff, of the data collected; one approach to reviews would be to look at a policy decision and analyze the role NCHS played in the decision; and another suggestion was that the review should anticipate policy issues of the future and what will be needed for NCHS to be in a position to address those issues.

Agenda-setting for next Board meeting:

Program review: The Board agreed that Dr. Kalsbeek would take the lead on behalf of Board members in managing the program review process. The Board agreed that Drs. Kalsbeek and Madans would develop a second draft of the protocol for program reviews, based upon the above discussion. The new draft would include a proposed timetable for conducting the first review, with the first review considered a “pilot” that would be evaluated before proceeding with additional reviews. The Vital Statistics program would be the subject of the first program review, with the National Health Interview Survey slated for the 2nd review.

Other: Mr. Weinzimer will redistribute the questionnaire sent to Board members prior to the September 2004 meeting, in which Board members were asked to prioritize their subject-matter and NCHS program interests. This will assist the Board in considering the priorities and operational methods for addressing issues at upcoming meetings. Mr. Weinzimer will forward background information to the Board prior to the September 2005 meeting to more efficiently utilize the time allotted for Dr. Sondik’s “State of the Center” remarks.

Announcements:

Everyone present thanked retiring Board members Alvin Onaka, Aldona Robbins, and Robert Wallace, for their service to the Board. It was announced that Janet Norwood was reappointed for a 2-year term.

The next meeting of the BSC will take place on September 15-16, 2005, in Hyattsville, Maryland.

The Chair adjourned the meeting of the BSC at 2:00 p.m. on April 22.

I hereby confirm that these minutes are accurate to the best of my knowledge.

/S/_____
June E. O’Neill, Ph.D.

April 30, 2005

Attachment #1: Attendance: Sixth Meeting of the Board of Scientific Counselors, NCHS, April 21-22, 2005.

Members present were:

Chair: June E. O'Neill, Ph.D.

Designated Federal Official: Robert J. Weinizmer

Nicholas Eberstadt, Ph.D.

Raymond Greenberg, M.D., Ph.D.

William Kalsbeek, Ph.D.

Janet Norwood, Ph.D.

Alvin Onaka, Ph.D.

Neil Powe, M.D.

Aldona Robbins, Ph.D.

Matthew Snipp, Ph.D.

Robert Wallace, M.D.

Members not present were:

Michael Grossman, Ph.D.

Vivian Ho, Ph.D.

Alonzo Plough, Ph.D.

Louise Ryan, Ph.D.

Fernando Trevino, Ph.D.

NCHS staff present were:

Linda Washington

Robin Remsburg

Marjorie Greenberg

Nathaniel Schenker

Meena Khare

Vicki Burt

Lester Curtin

Sandy Smith

Jane Sisk

Lisa Broitman

Rosemarie Hirsch

Jane Gentleman

Charles Rothwell

Larry Cox

Sam Notzon

Lois Fingerhut

Debbie Jackson

Jennifer Catalano

Amy Bernstein

James Lubitz

Other Attendees

Simon Cohn

Attachment #2 : Draft Procedures for Evaluating NCHS Programs

I. Process

NCHS program management will be asked to prepare materials that provide general descriptions of their Programs and to respond to the questions outlined below.

The BSC will appoint a team (2-4 members) of outside experts to review the written material and site visit the Program. Guidelines will need to be developed for designating the program unit to be evaluated (survey, group of surveys, analytic unit). The names of potential reviewers will be provided by NCHS but the BSC can choose reviewers from a wider pool. One reviewer will be asked to serve as chair of the team. A BSC member may/will be asked to serve as a liaison to the team. NCHS will provide staff support to the team. The Review Team may ask the Program to provide additional information for the record.

The Review Team will present their evaluation to the full BSC for discussion. The BSC will be provided the material developed by the Program and the evaluation of the Review Team. The format for the presentation will be determined at a later date.

II. Material To Be Provided

The Program should provide the following descriptive information to the Review Team. The Program should attempt to develop the materials so that they are as succinct as possible.

Mission and Functional Statements

Organizational Structure

Major program activities

Information Products including data in all forms and publications of all types (print and web)

Staffing (types and levels of personnel)

Budget (method of display will need to be determined)

End Users

In addition to background information, the Program will be asked to address a set of questions. The questions are in the form of a self-study and the responses will allow the reviewers to evaluate the Program in terms of its adherence to general principles of sound science as well as the requirements of federal statistical agencies as set out in: Principles and Practices; OMB Data Quality Guidelines; OMB Standards for Statistical Surveys.

The questions attempt to evaluate the Program's resources, products and efforts to improve in terms of the current adequacy of the science and responsiveness to need. Resources refer to people, budget and other aspects of support. Products refer to all scientific products as noted above. Efforts to improve refers to planning, evaluation and development activities.

Resources; current adequacy:

Are current staffing levels appropriate for program functions?

Does the program have the right mixture of professional expertise in their staff?

Are budget allocations balanced for planned products?

Are fiscal and physical resources being used efficiently?

Resources; responsiveness to need

Are appropriate high quality personnel being recruited/retained?

Product; current adequacy:

Are the services (or products) meeting expectations in terms of quality, timeliness, usability, etc.? (this question could be broken into several that reflect the data quality standards and the standards for statistical surveys)

Are appropriate methods used to collect needed data?

Product; Responsiveness to Need:

Are the reports generated by the Program appropriate for the content of the data collection system or mission of the Program.

Is there an appropriate topical emphasis on journal articles by NCHS staff?

Does the program have active and appropriate partnerships in the development of its data collection systems and dissemination products?

Efforts to Improve:

Are there definable objectives for the data collection system to measure performance?

Is there an ongoing effort to evaluate and improve data quality?

Is there an ongoing attempt to improve the quality and timeliness of the data?

Is there an ongoing program to review the methods of data collection and dissemination?

Is there evidence of a strategic direction of the data collection system?

Is there a vision for the future and a pathway to get there?

Is there a good sense of their role within the larger organization (NCHS, CDC, Federal government) and do they collaborate well with others?